



Morning Alert - Wednesday, April 25, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK, NTV, and Fuji TV gave top play to the forecast for heavy rain in the Tokyo area today. TBS led with a report on a tabloid story that Education Minister Hayashi used his official vehicle to go to a yoga lesson. TV Asahi gave top play to a report that retired professional baseball player Sachio Kinugasa passed away at the age of 71 on Monday.

Major front-page items in national papers included the Abe cabinet's acceptance of the resignation of Vice Finance Minister Fukuda, the passing of retired professional baseball player Kinugasa, a teleconference held yesterday between Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Moon, and a plan by Tokyo prosecutors to launch full-scale investigation into Kobe Steel over falsified data about the quality of its products.

INTERNATIONAL

ROK leader to address abduction issue in meeting with DPRK counterpart

All papers reported on a teleconference held on Tuesday between Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Moon, during which the ROK leader promised that he will bring up the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea when he meets with Kim Jong Un on Friday. In response to Abe's request for taking up the subject, Moon was quoted as saying: "I will convey your position to Mr. Kim. I am planning to tell him that the resolution of the abductions of Japanese nationals will be conducive to building peace in Northeast Asia." Pointing out that Seoul had been noncommittal until yesterday about whether President Moon would address the matter during Friday's summit with the leader of his northern neighbor, Yomiuri speculated that the ROK leader is inclined to do so following President Trump's pledge to Abe in the Mar-a-Lago summit to take up the abductions in his meeting with Kim Jong Un.

The premier, when describing to Moon his recent summit with President Trump, reportedly mentioned the possibility of meeting with Kim Jong Un on the condition that the inter-Korean and U.S.-DPRK summits are successful. Abe reportedly told Moon: "If the nuclear and missile development and the abduction issues are settled, Japan will be able to normalize relations with North Korea based on the 2001 Pyongyang Declaration." During the 40-minute teleconference that took place in response to a request from Japan, Abe and Moon reportedly agreed to maintain pressure on the defiant regime. According to Yomiuri, however, a post-meeting briefing by the ROK side did not mention that the two leaders talked about "pressure."

FM Kono says denuclearization of North Korea should be completed by 2020

Yomiuri and Mainichi highlighted remarks made to the press in Geneva on Tuesday by Foreign Minister Kono, who noted that North Korea should denuclearize by the time the next U.S. presidential election is held in 2020. The Japanese official was quoted as saying: "The initial target must not be diminished. It is necessary to reach the goal while the current U.S. administration is in office."

Senior U.S., ROK diplomats reaffirm trilateral cooperation with Japan in dealing with DPRK

Sankei took up a meeting held yesterday in Seoul between visiting Acting Assistant Secretary of State Thornton and South Korea's chief representative to the Six-Party Talks, during which they reportedly confirmed the importance of deepening bilateral cooperation and trilateral communication and coordination with Japan in pursuing the denuclearization of North Korea. The DOS official reportedly paid a courtesy call on Foreign Minister Kang on Monday and left for Japan on Tuesday.

Senior Japanese diplomat comments on summit between Abe, Kim Jong Un

Mainichi reported on remarks made to LDP politicians on Tuesday by MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Kanasugi including a comment on the possibility of a summit between Prime Minister Abe and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un, quoting him as saying: "We would like to organize a summit when the time is right." The diplomat stressed, however, that such a meeting would be premised upon progress on the abduction issue.

China unhappy about DPRK's intention not to seek withdrawal of U.S. troops from ROK

Asahi reported from Seoul on the disclosure by a source involved in China-DPRK relations that China has conveyed to North Korea its displeasure with the Kim regime's apparent intention not to demand the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. The Chinese have reportedly insisted that the presence of the U.S. military on the Korean Peninsula will become unnecessary if the 1953 armistice agreement is converted into a peace treaty as a result of reconciliation with the United States. Although the Chinese side has separately requested that the DPRK government receive a visit by President Xi to Pyongyang ahead of the planned U.S.-North Korea summit, the Kim regime

has reportedly rejected the request by saying that priority needs to be given to Kim Jong Un's talks with President Trump.

G7 denounces Russia over Crimea, Syria, spy poisoning in UK

All papers reported on the conclusion on Monday of the G7 foreign ministerial meeting in Toronto, highlighting the strong language used in the joint statement to condemn Russia for the annexation of Crimea, the recent veto of a UN Security Council resolution on the alleged use of chemical weapons by Syria, and the alleged poisoning of a former Russian agent in the UK. Nikkei claimed, however, that Japan appeared somewhat reluctant to denounce Russia outright because it probably wants to seek Moscow's cooperation in addressing the North Korea issue and resolving the Northern Territories dispute.

ECONOMY

New consultations on trade by cabinet ministers to begin in mid-June or later

Mainichi and Yomiuri reported on press remarks on Tuesday by Economic Revitalization Minister Motegi, who projected that his first meeting with USTR Lighthizer under the agreed-upon "consultations for a free, fair, and reciprocal (FFR) trade deal" will be held in mid-June or later. According to Mainichi, the U.S. side has relayed to the GOJ strong expectations for the FFR talks by saying: "Mr. Lighthizer will be given a full mandate. Let's have serious discussions." While noting that the Trump administration plans to use the new consultations to seek a bilateral FTA in order to export more agricultural products and automobiles, the daily wrote that Motegi disclosed yesterday to LDP lawmakers that he has already clearly told the U.S. that when it comes to farm products, Tokyo will not make concessions beyond the scope of what was agreed upon for the TPP.

Japan to support U.S. in exporting natural gas to Asia

Yomiuri and Mainichi focused on the second "Public-Private Sector Roundtable Discussion on U.S.-Japan Cooperation on Third Country Infrastructure" held at the State Department on Monday, saying that a GOJ representative explained Tokyo's plan to support exports of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) to the Asian market. The papers speculated that the GOJ is keen to support the Trump administration's efforts to reduce its trade deficits with the goal of deflecting U.S. pressure on the trade front.

Sankei carried a similar story, saying that Tokyo plans to allow the GOJ-affiliated Japan Bank of International Cooperation to offer low-interest loans to Asian nations to build facilities to store LNG imported from the United States. The GOJ-affiliated Nippon Export and Investment Insurance will also reportedly offer low-premium insurance to hedge against the risk of accidents involving the shipment of American LNG to Asia. The daily expressed doubt about whether this policy will help mitigate U.S. trade pressure on Tokyo since it will not help correct the bilateral trade imbalance.

SECURITY

USMC F-35 makes “emergency landing” in Fukuoka

Asahi, Yomiuri, and Sankei wrote very briefly in their city news sections that an Iwakuni-based F-35B made an emergency landing at ASDF Tsuiki base in Fukuoka on Tuesday morning due to a mechanical malfunction, saying that the exact nature of the problem is unknown. No injuries or damage was reported.

GOJ pledges 3 billion yen in subsidies for Nago

Asahi, Yomiuri, and Nikkei reported that the central government has formally decided to provide the municipal government of Nago, Okinawa, with 3 billion yen in subsidies in response to the newly-elected mayor Toguchi's de-facto endorsement of the FRF construction initiative off Camp Schwab. The money will reportedly be used primarily for education, including making daycare free of charge.

